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AUTHOR Field, David A.
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ABSTRACT

In this lecture, about sixty of the more important small and large sports sculptures and medals of Professor Joseph D. Brown are discussed and illustrated through the use of 35mm color slides. A brief description of the sculptor's life, interests, and philosophy of sport is also given. (MB)

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A VIGNETTE OF AN AMERICAN SPORTING SCULPTOR: JOSEPH D. BROWN

by

David A. Field
Department of Men's Physical Education
Ball State University
Muncie, Indiana

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EDUCATION & WELFARE
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How do you start off describing a man who was honest enough to always tell it "like it was"---even before he attained success? Where does one start recording important events in a person's life when upon nearing retirement age, he has devoted so much of his energy to boxing, teaching, sculpturing, and to philosophizing?

(Slide Antaeus) When Red Smith, the sine quo non of the New York Times Sports Department, was asked to write part of the introduction for Joe Brown's Retrospective Catalogue 1932-1966 he said of this work, "This (Antaeus) has been my favorite for fifteen years. You know that it was a good shot that dropped Antaeus, for he is rocked away back on his hunkers, right leg doubled behind, and there is dazed pain in his face. You know just as surely that he is going to get up, for there is something indomitable in that tough face.

(Slide Antaeus Bronze) Joe Brown is himself a great sports reporter. He reproduces the fluid action with faithful accuracy, he captures the zest of combat. Boxing especially grabs him, not only because he was a boxer before he was a sculptor but because fist fighting is the most natural, most fundamental, the purest form of athletic competition." Red continued, "If you see and feel and remember these things is the name of the game, then Joe plays it better than anybody else I know."

(Slide Interior of Gym Studio) In an antiquated elementary school gymnasium on the Princeton University campus, Joe plays out his last days before retirement sculpting and teaching---predominately in the sporting rein although he has done

(Slide #2 Studio Interior)

Robert Frost, John Steinbeck, and Archibald MacLeish among the notables ---

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(Slide Freedom of Expression) even an occasional contemporary such as Freedom of Expression.

(Slide Brown Sculpting) He was born in South Philadelphia in 1909. His dad was a tailor. Before Joe began school, the family moved to Devil's Pocket. It was here that he first heard the taunts of his neighbors calling out, "Jew," and as a result he soon learned how to use his fists.

(Slide Boxer Bandaging Hands 1939 - 44" high) Another motivator was his brother, Harry "Kid" Brown who fought professionally for 18 years and was a contender for the light heavyweight championship of the world. The money that the latter brought home from a few of his fights, plus the great ego trip shared with a brother when everyone poured adulation upon him after his winning bouts, made Joe think about going into prize fighting for his livelihood. When Joe was eight years old, Harry brought home \$2400 as a winner's purse and went downtown to buy the family some gifts. This convinced Joe that prize fighting was the route to go.

(Slide Counter Punch 1948) Nevertheless, sometime during his high school days at Southern High School in Philly, he changed his mind and thought about going to Temple University to study dentistry. He entered on a football scholarship but stayed with the sport only two years. In his sophomore year he became captain of the boxing team and after sparring in a very capable manner against an opponent who had previously won the AAU Heavyweight Championships, a promoter, Phil Glassman, convinced Brown to turn professional the following year.

(Slide Boxing 1944 National Academy's Barnet Prize) Like so many of the fighters of years ago, he fought under an assumed name so that his parents wouldn't know the truth. Soon he was making good money---first \$75, then \$100, then \$125 for his first three bouts. By the end of his junior year in college he had a 9-0 record with four knockouts. In compiling his undefeated record, he had grown too smart to fight. While the sports reporters were saying that "He had great courage," and the opponents had "Never laid a glove on him,"---he knew differently. He had

felt the opponents' blows, his body had begun to show it, and he didn't like it. In retrospect he says, "We are willing and anxious to watch two young men, bred in poverty and imbued with little hope but a lot of spirit, try to batter each other senseless. In boxing a brain concussion---the aim of the 'game'---triggers an explosion of applause for the man who triggered the concussion. Where else does that happen in sport? Are we entitled not only to a pound of flesh but to a pint of blood as a chaser?" His rationale for hanging around the ring for even one year was expressed in one of his short stories when he wrote, "I guess it's like a lot of guys who go to the whorehouse. It's nice to have someone call you 'honey' once in awhile---even if it ain't for real."

Continuing, Brown adds more of his philosophy about boxing: "Boxing is a game in which the necessity for making human adjustments is inescapable. If you are facing a man with your dukes up, you are like the only two guys in the world. If you make a bum guess, you get a load of knuckles on the kisser. If he figures wrong, it's his puss that's socked. The time has come to get down to this individual basis and to find out what makes the other fellow tick if we are ever going to prevent other people killing one another in war. Everyone thinks he is all right, but something is wrong with the rest of humanity."

Joe changed from dentistry to physical education in his junior year at Temple. His entry into art began at the same time. A sculptor on the faculty, Walter Hancock, admired Joe's athletic physique and asked him to pose as a model. Joe was surprised but pleased. Eventually, one day while in the studio he picked up a little ball of clay and made a torso and showed it to Walter wisecracking, "I never took a lesson either!" Then he crumpled it in his palm, and when Walter protested, Joe remarked, "Oh I can do more like that." Hancock gave him some tools and clay and said, "Let's see if you can." Joe did and turned out three boxers and then entered them in the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts Exhibit. All were accepted.

(Slide McKenzie Bust) R. Tait McKenzie was an outstanding sculptor of the day as well as the first director of physical education at the University of Pennsylvania. He saw the exhibit and invited Joe to serve as his protege. For eight grueling years he served as an apprentice and an assistant to McKenzie. During that time he had taken a number of prizes in national exhibits, including the Barnet Prize offered by the National Academy of Design of New York. In 1944 he also won the gold medal of the Montclair Museum of Art.

Probably the most significant thing that R. Tait McKenzie said to Brown was after he saw one of Joe's first works. He said, "You did this without teaching?" Brown nodded in expectation of the master's praise. "What a shame," said McKenzie. "A shame?" said Brown, crushed. "Why?" "Because these things are so good, it's a shame they are not better." McKenzie then said "Joe, when you are gone, people will look at your work and say, 'It's good or bad'---not how long did it take?"

^{He}
~~My~~ relationship with McKenzie lasted eight years and it was a painful, but fruitful, and an unforgettable relationship that left ~~me~~ with a respect for ~~my~~ teacher, a respect for ~~my~~ craft, and respect for the intangibles as well as for the tangibles that are involved in the creation of what we call a "work of art."

Brown once said, "Sports have been an important part of my life, but only a part. I have never known an athlete who wasn't much more than an athlete, and basically, sports situations are exercises in living, ^{and} ~~for~~ plays a preparation for the responsibilities of living: the successes, the failures, and the stalemates. But play situations, too, can become perverted, and the possible perversion of things that should be good is also a valid subject for art."

(Slide Pivot 1947) Joe's idealism and independence showed during his last years at Temple when he dropped both his football and boxing scholarships upon learning that several members of both squads were not even enrolled in the school. He regained his scholarship as an assistant in the Anatomy Department and here he began working with cadavers.

In the 1930's while still working with McKenzie, and making no more than \$15 a week, he met Gwyneth King, an artist, and they decided to marry. Mrs. Brown is widely known as a painter, and her work has been exhibited throughout the country such as at the Chicago Art Institute, Cornell University and her monoprints in the permanent collections at the Library of Congress and the California State Library and also Princeton University.

At this time Princeton had just dropped boxing. Joe arrived on the scene and convinced them to retain it in the intramural program, and he began work as a boxing instructor there in 1937. Spider Kelley, the boxing coach at Princeton, had died in 1937 so Joe applied for the job even though the University had second thoughts about permitting boxing to continue. He wrote a second letter stating why he thought it should be retained and also enclosed a booklet which he had written in praise of the sport. This interested Princeton authorities, and he was invited for an interview. He gave a two hour demonstration of what he meant when he said and wrote that boxing was a good sport for college boys. He got the job and coached boxing there three days a week and worked and studied with Dr. McKenzie in Philadelphia the remaining days.

(Slide Break 1958) McKenzie was Brown's strongest influence. The two got into a number of hot debates during their eight years together. McKenzie did not approve of action studies because it was contrary to the Greek ideal of "before and after the moment." The Greeks thought action studies were vulgar. Brown said, "I like action. I like to catch them at a moment of dynamic action."

Douglas Duer, the illustrator, and Walter Hancock provided him with his first tools, studio space, and clay for his first try at sculpting on the campus.

(Slide Bill Bradley 1965)

When originally hired he did not mention to the university officials that he had artistic talent. However, when a creative arts program began in the late 30's,

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he convinced the school on a course in sculpture for developing rough talent. He used nude female models to help attract the students, and needless to say, the classes were full. From that time on he has become very popular because of his accessibility to students and his frankness. Ex-university president Harold W. Dodds once said of Joe, "Please. Call him a personality, not a character." Brown sponsored the annual Princeton boxing tournament through the late 50's and coached the sport during the 60's without pay.

(Slide #3 Studio Interior) After a long struggle, he finally attained full professorship rank. "They always argued that I wasn't a scholar in the traditional sense," he says. "Hell, I'm not a scholar in any sense. I'm not proud of that or ashamed of it." He added, "The university wants a creative arts program alright but it is scared to death of creative people. It refused to offer the artist the same promise of permanence that it offers teachers-scholars, and teachers-scientists." He added, "There is a big difference between a mistress and a wife." The reason for this utterance was because, prior to his academic rank, he was classified as a "Sculptor in Residence."

(Slide Sculpting Relay Racer) In 1939 he was named a resident fellow in sculpture. Nine years later, he was named as Princeton's Man of the Week for "Believing and Proving that Art Belongs to the Man in the Street as well as to the Artistic and the So-Called Intellectual; for Demonstrating, Even to the Most Discerning Collegienne, that Athletics and Other Extra-Curricular Activities are Means and not Ends in Themselves; and for Insisting that No Phase of Education, Including the Physical, Should Ever be Painful."

Included in his philosophy of life he once said, "All the fellows wear head-gear during boxing lessons. There's nothing particularly manly or healthy in the

way some men learn to box by taking a beating. Letting a fellow swat you silly while you stand there and take it is pure crazy. Boxing is fun, and educational. That it happens to be a valuable asset in a man's life is unquestionably another value, but why stress it?" He dislikes to have boys learn how to handle their fists just because it's "A mighty useful thing to know." That is the wrong approach like telling a child he better learn to swim or else he'll drown someday. Keep it on the fun basis; never mind the fear angle."

(Slide Hurler 1935)

Glaucoma caused him to lose his right eye in 1942, and there was a question whether he could continue his sculpting. It did not stop him---anymore than did a calcified hip which had to be replaced by a plastic one in the early 1970's.

(Slide Double Play)

(Slide Foul)

(Slide Sketch of Full Swing)

(Slide Takraw Chin Lon Ho - Burmese)

In 1961 the State Department invited him to travel to Japan, Thailand, Indonesia, and Burma to sculpt busts of 2/3 size of Asian statesmen. One was to go to the State Department in Washington and the other to the American Embassy in the country from which the subject represented. His wife accompanied him on the trip in 1961 and demonstrated art techniques as well as illustrating scenes of "Life In The USA" to accompany a lecture made by a United States Information Service Cultural Officer.

(Slide Thai Kick Boxer)

(Slide Weight Lifter Tun Maung 1961 - 12" high)

(Slide Mahlaui Saelan of Indonesia Olympic Team 1961 - 12" high)

(Slide paperweight version of Hook Slide done in 1949)

(Slide closeup of Bas ball Player) A huge model which was recently placed in the Veteran's Stadium in Philadelphia. Four 15½' sculptures of baseball.

(Slide Baseball Feet) The feet are 36" long. \$100,000 was set aside for this work. (Slide Feet).

(Slide Oklahoma Ride - 12" high) Wrestling

(Slide Center Forward - 16" high) Soccer

(Slide Goalie)

Brown has done Ivy League soccer, fencing, wrestling, and squash trophies as well as the National Intercollegiate and Interscholastic Swimming trophy. The (Slide The Crawl 1948 - 9½" x 4 3/4" x 2½") Eastern Interscholastic Swimming Medal and the AAU Swimming Monument are also among his more recent works.

(Slide Gordon Sikes Award)

(Slide Butterfly) Was done of Bob Brawner from life and is 5" x 9½" and was done in 1951.

(Slide The Eastern Interscholastic Swimming Championship Medal 1959 - 2" in diameter)

(Slide Coach and Swimmer 1956 - 25" x 24" x 26" #1)

(Slide Coach and Swimmer #2)

(Slide Joe Burk) Another aquatic work of his is that of Joe Burk, noted Philadelphia oarsman, done in 1938. It is 48" high.

(Slide Joe Burk and Jack Kelly Sr.)

(Slide Saber Parry 1949 - 12")

He has given exhibitions at Yale, Springfield College, Bucknell University, University of Virginia, and in 1962 in Washington at the NEA Building for the First National Conference of Secondary School Athletic Administrators. His works have also been shown in group exhibitions at the Philadelphia Museum, the National Sculpture Society, Chicago Art Institute, and the National Gallery.

(Slide one of the very few feminine works that Joe has done is that of Ballerina done in 1965. It is 30" high)

(Slide Young Golfer)

(Slide Arthur Ashe 1966 - 20" high)

(Slide among Brown's track and field works is this studio mural of The Handoff in a long distance relay race.)

(Slide here we have a Handoff in a shorter distance race. The original of this was done in 1965 for John's Hopkins University. It is 8' high.)

(Slide this one of The Hurdler was one of his earlier ones.)

(Slide Bill Bonthron a great Princeton miler of the 30's)

(Slide this one was taken of Jesse Owens and was done in 1942 from life. It is 26" high.)

(Slide football has commanded much of his attention as seen by the following Line-Buck done in 1959 and it is 15" high.)

(Slide one of his earlier works was Center, Vintage 1930 done in 1934 and it is 9" high. To the left of this is Donald Lourie done in 1963 and is 9" high.)

(Slide Holding the Ball 1949 - 15" high)

(Slide Punter 1947 - 18" high)

(Slide Jump-Pass 1949 - 12" high)

(Slide Miniature Football Group)

(Slide Cutting Down a Back 1964 - 15" high)

(Slide Tackle)

(Slide Veteran's Stadium Football Player) This is a closeup of the incomplete huge football player before it was shipped to Italy for casting.

(Slide although Joe was never a gymnast, he seemed to have all of the empathy necessary to sculpt this Handstand in 1946. It was 14" high)

His alma mater, Temple University, recognized his great artistic talent, and (Slide New Gymnasium) when it dedicated its new Physical Education Building in the early 1970's, it commissioned him to do these two gymnasts doing a twisting hand-to-hand stand. This one is a model.

(Slide) and here we grasp the immensity (18½' high) of the real one as it nears its finishing stages in the interior of his gymnasium (studio).

(Slide) another slide of the same period.

(Slide) this is a detail of the hand grasp.

(Slide Pieta - in silver)

Since Brown's athletic career started out as a boxer, one would naturally expect him to do most of his work along those lines. This is true.

His disdain for art critics is revealed with the statement: "Art isn't done by a few people for a few people. It shouldn't die in museums. A minority with nebulous credentials tries to tell us what is significant. They are what I call the high priests of significance. Bull. No one is going to tell me where I itch." And with this parting straight forward "tell it like it is" remark, we leave Joe Brown.